



# Indiana Department of Education

SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Indiana School Superintendents and Principals

**FROM:** Dr. Tony Bennett, Superintendent of Public Instruction

**DATE:** April 30, 2009

**SUBJECT:** Additional Flu Guidance for Schools

I want to take this opportunity to provide our local school communities with the latest information and guidance in response to ongoing reports of the international flu outbreak, which includes one confirmed case in northern Indiana as of this writing.

Health officials have continued to report that symptoms of the flu virus – now officially known as Influenza A (H1N1)/North America/Human – are similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal flu and the effects on most individuals in the U.S. have been mild. We ask that you assist us in ensuring that students, staff and their families remain cautious, but calm, as this situation develops.

Hoosier families need to know that 1) the health and safety of Indiana students is always our top priority, 2) local schools are taking proper precautions now to prevent the spread of this flu, and 3) we are prepared to take additional action if necessary. ***Based on current guidance from the Indiana State Department of Health and Department of Homeland Security, school closures are only required in the event of a confirmed case of the H1N1 flu virus at this time.*** (See attached communication to local health departments from State Health Commissioner Judy Monroe.)

### **In the event of school closures**

Should the State Health Commissioner or a local county health official issue a ***school closure order as a direct result of a confirmed case of the H1N1 flu virus***, the Indiana Department of Education is prepared to consider waiving the financial penalty this year for a school that falls short of the state's 180-day instructional time requirement. The state would provide similar latitude should a closure order prevent a school from completing its spring ISTEP+ test administration under these extraordinary circumstances.

### **What schools should do now**

For now, we urge you to stay informed, promote good basic hygiene practices, and encourage students and staff to stay home from school if they begin developing flu-like symptoms. The Indiana Department of Education will continue to share additional information and instructions with local schools as the situation continues to develop. As noted in earlier communications, schools are encouraged to take the steps outlined below to prevent or contain the spread of the flu virus.

### 1) Review emergency preparedness plans

- Review/revise your local emergency and contingency operation procedures as appropriate.
- Communicate your crisis plan within your school community.
- Consider such contingencies as alternative means for providing education or childcare services for students in the event that the school must close.

### 2) Practice good personal hygiene

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.

### 3) Try to avoid close contact with sick people

- Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.
- Stay home from work or school if you get sick and limit contact with others.
- If you have milder flu symptoms, stay home and contact your health care provider for advice. Seek medical care if symptoms become more severe, such as high fever, trouble breathing, or inability to keep down fluids.

### 4) Get credible information

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- Indiana State Department of Health: [www.in.gov/flu](http://www.in.gov/flu) or [www.in.gov/isdh](http://www.in.gov/isdh), 1-877-826-0011

### Symptoms and how it spreads

The symptoms appear to be similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza, including fever, lethargy, lack of appetite and coughing. Some people also have reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. The spread of this virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads, mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing. ***Influenza viruses are not transmitted by food. You cannot get influenza from eating pork or pork products.*** Eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products is safe. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 160°F kills the flu virus as it does other bacteria and viruses.



Indiana State  
Department of Health  
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Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr.  
Governor

Judith A. Monroe, M.D.  
State Health Commissioner

April 30, 2009

Dear Colleague:

The CDC guidance on school and childcare closure states that: Dismissal of students should be strongly **considered** in schools with a **confirmed or a suspected case epidemiologically linked to a confirmed case**. The complete guidance on this subject is on the CDC Web site at: <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/mitigation.htm>

Given the pandemic severity index of one as announced by CDC, suggesting that this virus is causing illness no more severe than seasonal influenza, this guidance shows good reasoning. My recommendation to the Governor and to the Department of Education is that Indiana follow the current guidance from CDC. Indiana schools are completing ISTEP this week and students will be completing the school year and taking final exams in the next few weeks. Unless there is a real risk within a school, it should not be closed which disrupts both the student's academic progress and creates logistical problems for parents. The ISDH will be available to assist you in making the decision to dismiss a school in the event that we identify a confirmed case or suspect case epidemiologically linked to a confirmed case.

If you have any questions, please contact Jim Howell, State Epidemiologist at 317-431-5015.

Sincerely,

Judith A. Monroe, M.D.  
State Health Commissioner